

CITY OF FRANKLIN FLOOD RECOVERY

Preventing Mold Growth after a Flood

If your home or building has been exposed to floodwaters immediate action may prevent a costly mold cleanup. Begin by reviewing this checklist.

- **Be careful!** Floodwaters are often contaminated by sewage and there is risk of serious infection if wounds are not cleaned and treated.
- **Pump out flooded basements gradually.** Pump out flooded basements gradually, about one-third of the water per day, to avoid structural damage. If the water is pumped completely in a short period, pressure from water-saturated soil on the outside could cause basement walls to collapse.
- **Remove sludge, mud, and dirt.** Beware that often after an area flood, public and private sewer backups have left various contaminants in and around buildings.
- **Remove personal belongings.** Begin removing wet carpets, furniture, contents, and boxes of water soaked items. Store items to be salvaged from the flooded area outside or in a garage, not in upper floors of the flooded building. By storing items in other areas of the building may accidentally carry mold or other contaminants to other building areas.
- **Re-assess the building structure and mechanical systems.** Now that there is unobstructed access throughout a building, a more thorough and accurate visual inspection should be performed to look for evidence of building movement or unsafe gas or electrical connections.
- **Remove floor trim and lower portions of walls.** Begin removing drywall or paneling including insulation in rooms exposed to floodwaters. Porous materials like drywall or plaster that have been exposed cannot effectively be cleaned and should be discarded.
- **Does fiberglass insulation need to be removed?** Fiberglass insulation, when wet, loses its R-value and can contribute to keeping moisture in the wall cavity. The insulation should not be dried and reused because of the contaminants associated with the floodwater. All wet insulation and insulation exposed to floodwater should be discarded.
- **How much drywall should be removed?** When floors and walls have been exposed, it is advisable to remove materials a minimum of twelve (12) inches above the exposed area. Even if the level of floodwater rise up in the wall, water on a floor surface can enter the wall cavity and may likely cause a hidden problem for mold to grow in the wall cavity.
- **What if mold is visible?** On drywall-covered walls, remove drywall to no less than twelve (12) inches above any visible mold and thoroughly inspect the wall cavity for visible mold. Because drywall comes in four (4) foot widths, it is often economical to remove more drywall than the bare minimum, but to remove it in four (4) or two (2) foot increments from the floor upwards.

- **Remember!** Remove all visibly moldy drywall in addition to removing drywall for an additional twelve (12) inches above the last visible mold and water level. Additionally, remove drywall horizontally for at least one more wall-stud bay. Inspect the backside drywall, which has been removed, and the cavity side of drywall, which remains in place to be sure there is no visible mold.
- **Remove ceilings.** Ceilings that have been flooded from above, regardless of material such as plaster, drywall, or ceiling tiles should be removed. Suspended ceiling tiles, which have been wet, should also be discarded. The remaining suspended ceiling tiles removed to allow inspection and for drying of structural members.
- **Reducing airborne mold spores.** Implementing a containment technique will help reduce air movement from the damaged, mold containing areas to other habitable parts of the building.
- **What is containment?** "Containment" means that plastic barriers are set up and other steps are taken to isolate a moldy or dusty work area from the rest of a building. Creating a "negative air" atmosphere by use of fans blowing outdoors from the work area and plastic barriers at point(s) of entry will isolate the work area from the rest of the building. The intent is to keep dust from the work area from entering other building areas.
- **Surface Cleaning.** After rough demolition to remove wet and visibly moldy materials, all remaining loose dirt and debris should be removed. The remaining exposed surfaces such as wall studs and framing, masonry walls, floors, plywood sheathing, should be cleaned to remove all loose and surface debris. Stains in wood do not have to be removed provided there is no remaining surface mold or debris.
- **Mold/contaminated surface disinfection.** Assume that sewage contaminants accompanied floodwaters, so disinfection of all building surfaces should be part of the cleaning process. However as emphasized above, do not permit the use of disinfectant or fungicidal sprays to serve as a substitute for removal of all debris and the physical cleaning of dirty or moldy surfaces.
- **Can surface cleaning and disinfection proceed before the building has been fully dried? Yes, but** this process cannot be reliably completed until the building has been dried. Cleaning structural items and personal belongings while they are wet will help to reduce the spreading of mold spores and pathogens. Workers should wear gloves, masks, and disposal clothing to avoid being exposed to dirty water and cleaning solutions.
- **Using dehumidifiers, fans, heaters.** There are a variety of ways to dry exposed building areas and surfaces. Simply adding fans such as box fans or window fans on floors indoors, and pointed at wet surfaces will significantly speed the dry out process. Dehumidifiers, when used alone, will not achieve timely results.
- **Inspect upper levels.** A room or attic located over a flooded basement or room is likely to have an excessive moisture level. Thoroughly ventilate these upper levels of the building. Depending on weather conditions, ventilation may mean simply opening windows and using fans to dry an area. Avoid blowing moist air into a cool building, as this will increase building moisture.